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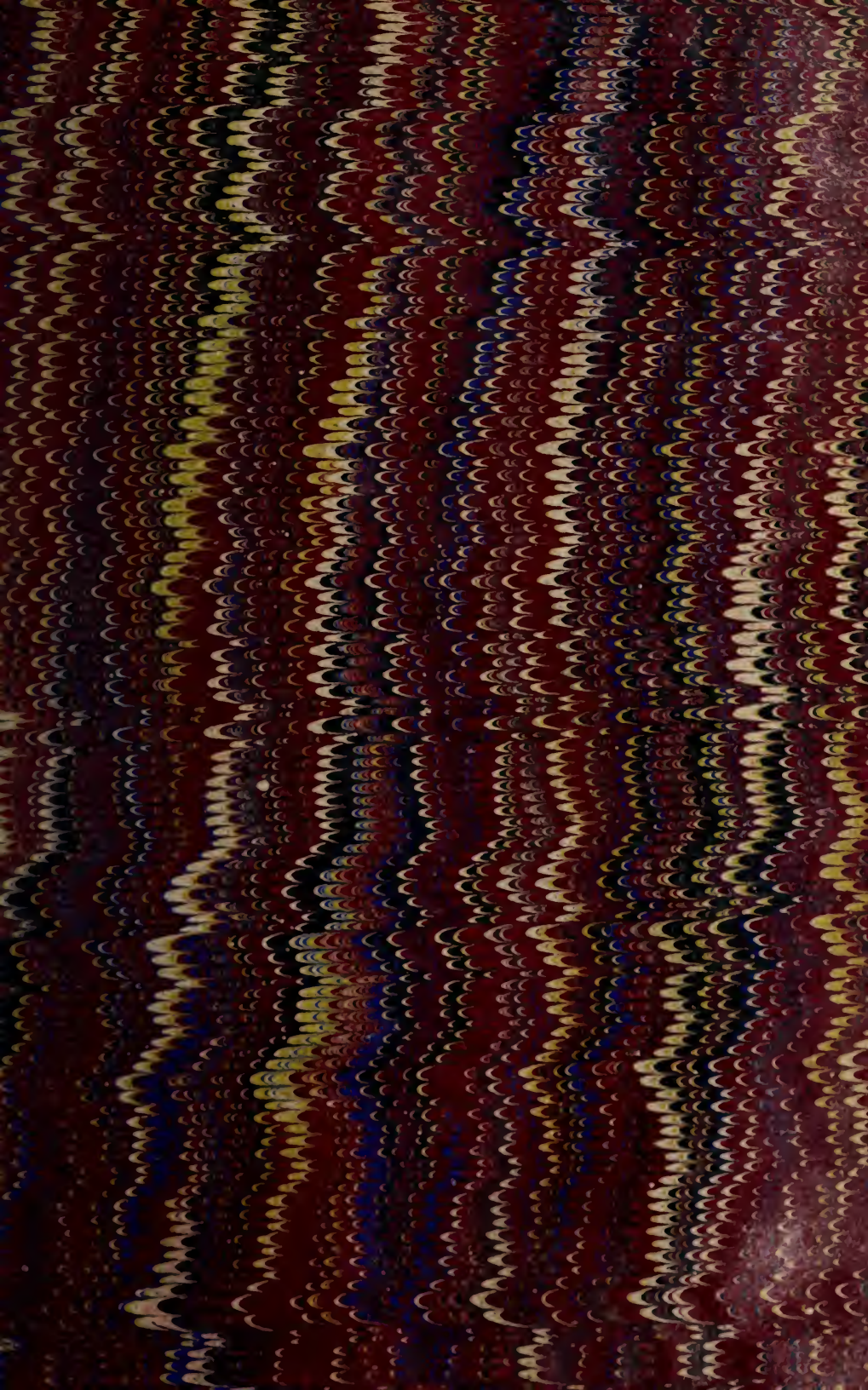
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



THE
LAST SERMON

DELIVERED TO THE

First Congregational Church of Albany,

IN THE

OLD BRICK EDIFICE.

ON

SUNDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 9, 1868.

BY THE PASTOR

REV. W. S. SMART.

ALBANY:
JOEL MUNSELL
1868

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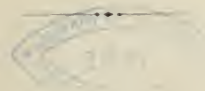
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CORRESPONDENCE.

ALBANY, Feb. 11, 1868.

Rev. Wm. S. Smart,

Rev. and Dear Sir:

The undersigned, having listened with much pleasure to the sermon delivered by you, in the First Congregational Church, on the occasion of our leaving our House of Worship, on the evening of February 9th, 1868, would respectfully request a copy of the same for publication.

Truly yours,

JOHN G. TREADWELL,	C. P. WILLIAMS,
JAS. McNAUGHTON,	WILLIAM GOULD,
LAWSON ANNESLEY,	THEODORE D. SMITH,
RICHARD L. ANNESLEY,	A. S. KIBBEE,
M. H. READ,	ABRAM KOONZ,
WM. H. BURTON,	ISAAC EDWARDS,
S. D. BROWER,	B. R. WOOD,
WALTER S. BROWER,	EDWARD SAVAGE,
W. L. LEARNED,	MARTIN L. MEAD,
GEORGE W. PIERCE.	

ALBANY, Feb. 13, 1868.

*To John G. Treadwell, C. P. Williams,
James McNaughton, Wm. Gould, and others.*

Gentlemen:

In compliance with your request, I submit for publication a copy of the last sermon preached in the First Congregational Church of Albany, situated on the northeast corner of South Pearl and Beaver streets.

The interest of the occasion, and the reminiscences which it awakened, I hope may impart sufficient value to the discourse, to justify its appearance in print.

Your friend,

WM. S. SMART.

S E R M O N .

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple : and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things ? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.—MATT. xxiv, 1-2.

It is perhaps impossible for us, at this remove from the times of Jesus, to imagine the amazement which this remark excited in the simple minds of his disciples. They were Jews whose national vanity and religious feeling was alike gratified by the magnificence of Herod's temple. They yet moved in the narrow circle of Jewish ideas which limited the work of Jesus to the expansion over the world of the Hebrew theocracy with Jerusalem as the centre. It was the kingdom of the Jew of which they ever thought, and not, of that kingdom of God which Christ came to found in human hearts, with its universal service of truth and spirit. And hence at the first moment when they are alone, we find them,

with awe-struck minds asking for an explanation of this event. "When shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming."

Christ evidently considered the mood into which their minds had been thrown by his prediction, as favorable to a fuller development of his ideas about the future. He handles the topic with great freedom. He speaks of the conflicts which are coming in the world. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecutions for righteousness sake, abounding iniquity, the love of many waxing cold, some enduring unto the end, and the gospel, surviving all shocks and conflicts yet holding the final act of the drama back, until it shall be preached in all the world, "and then shall the end come." The events attending the destruction of Jerusalem are depicted, and made a type of the final judgment, and of those intervening days of judgment, through which the world must pass to take its place before "the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Then follow a series of parables in which he describes the great judgment itself, and warns his disciples to be in readiness

for it. The whole scene closes with that final separation of the countless multitude, which, to the end of time, must thrill all hearts, whenever it is seriously considered; "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

We may well pardon the vanity and Jewish pride of the disciples who came to Christ, to shew him the buildings of the temple, and thus furnished the text, out of which this remarkable discourse grew. For the eighteen centuries, which have elapsed since it was uttered, are but the expansion of its thoughts, furnishing positive proof of the far reaching insight of the mind of Jesus, and preparing us to receive as authentic his declarations concerning things yet to come.

It is in these circumstances which attended the utterance of this discourse, rather than in the words themselves, that the thought lies which is applicable to our circumstances to-night. Christ had reached that period in his career when every event was significant. The crisis of his life was but a few days off. Though he seemed to move with the greatest freedom among the people

who thronged Jerusalem, and though no man laid hands on him as he taught daily in the temple, it was a delusive peace. His death has already been determined in secret wrath, and Scribe and Pharisee with Judas, the infamous friend, only wait for a favorable opportunity, to quench his insufferable truth and purity in death. We read in the first verse, "and Jesus went out and departed from the temple." A very simple act; one he had often performed before. But now it possesses new meaning, and suggests high and moving thoughts. It is the last time he shall ever tread these courts. It is his final departure from the temple. Naturally, it suggested to his mind the closing up, and passing away forever, of the second great epoch of God's revelation to man. As Patriarchal had given place to Mosaic, so now in this fullness of time, must the Mosaic pass into and be eclipsed by the clearer and final revelation, the Word made flesh. At the first it was the kingdom of God in a family; then the kingdom of God in a nation; now it is to be the kingdom of God in all the world. Formerly men worshiped in this place; now neither in this mountain, nor

yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father, but God everywhere will seek for those who worship him in spirit and truth.

The destruction of such a building as Herod's temple, would excite in the ordinary Jewish mind nothing but sadness and despair. In addition to the historic and religious associations which gathered around Mount Zion, Herod had designed this work to be a monument which should bear his name to posterity; and so had spared no cost or pains to make it, as it really was, one of the most remarkable and beautiful buildings in the world. Even Tacitus speaks of the extraordinary magnificence of the temple, and Titus would have spared it, in the sack of Jerusalem, as a monument of art, had not providence gone before him in the torch of a Roman soldier. Yet Christ speaks of its destruction without emotion. "Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here, one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Why he should regard with calmness an event which was full of terror and evil forebodings to the Jewish mind, may be discovered in the nature of the work in which he was engaged. He was

the divine prophet of a new order of things in the world. While treating the past with reverence, he bestowed upon it, no sickly admiration. As the past culminated in him, so the future should date from his birth, the rise of a new era. No ordinary person was this Son of man. That age with its narrow prejudices, its low aims, its hopeless, inane formalities in religion, did not produce him. The life of Galilee, nor of Jerusalem contained no germ from which such a fresh original spirit could have sprung. He flashes suddenly into view, out of surrounding darkness, a new revelation from God, a fresh incarnation of divine truth; and his words so wonderfully catholic, so true to the simplicities of nature, so full of life to all who receive them, are the indisputable proofs of his having come from God. Christ wrought no miracle so wonderful as this. Before all his works he is the grand miracle which attracts the faith of the world. Coming forth out of the depths of Jewish prejudice and the interminable traditions of the Rabbis he at once assumes the place of the world's greatest man. After eighteen centuries he is still the world's greatest man. He has never

been surpassed. To surpass him is impossible. To come up with him is the utmost that humanity may expect; for he is "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

So elevated a spirit, advancing along the path of the kingdom of God, might well look with calmness upon the removal of that place, once the house of prayer, but now a den of thieves; of that place founded to teach the world the love of God, but now rearing its splendor to cover a faith that shuts all the world, but itself, out from the kingdom of heaven. No magnificence of art, no power of man can preserve such a sham. Let it fall, that upon its ruins may rise the enduring structure of a universal religion, whose message shall be to all of every clime and age: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Let it fall, for henceforth and forever, the world needs no sacred place, no temple. Its shrine shall be Jesus, its temple the regenerated human life, its priesthood that of the pure in heart everywhere. Henceforth God shall not dwell in temples made with hands, but in

every true and beautiful and holy life ; for “ know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you.” The church is not the brick or stone, however curiously wrought or skillfully put together : the church is the body of Christ. “ Now ye are the body of Christ.”

In accordance with this truth our fathers called such places as we are in to-night, not churches, but “ meeting houses.” And although the name may sound harsh to our modern ears, and may even sound irreligious — as many things the Puritans said and did appear to some — yet under it is a veritable principle. It was but one of the ways in which that intensely spiritual age, sought, by its scorn of art in worship, to realize the simple and direct communion of the soul with God. With all our refinements upon this simple order of faith, with all our improvements in architecture and music, with all our yielding to the demands of an age that wants to be religious through the eye and the ear, rather than through the heart, of an age that wants to be sung into heaven on the wings of grand oratorios, and to be preached

into heaven by the fervor of human eloquence, no one can read the history of these much abused, grand, old Puritans without feeling that they lived nearer to God, and acted under a higher inspiration of eternal things, than we do to-day, with all our art.

Christ is the life of the world. Men must go to him to be saved. Whatever then stands between the soul's full devotion and Christ, be it a church, be it a choir, be it a minister, be it a service as rich and beautiful as that of Rome, with Herod's temple, let them all perish, that Christ may be "all and in all." And they shall. For that which could give no reason for being tolerated in the day of Christ, can give no reason for being tolerated in this nineteenth century. The world will not accept of a religion modeled upon the Jewish idea, but demands and will have the free, untrammelled religion of the spirit which Christ inaugurated. The faith of the world seeks for Jesus, you cannot satisfy it with anything less, even could you reproduce Solomon's temple in all its glory. Christ has long since departed out of such weak embodiments of religion, and claims for him-

self alone, the power and honor of salvation. When I consider the astounding declarations, that this church or that church is the way of salvation ; or that such and such rites are necessary to salvation ; I feel like making the inquiry — not in an uncharitable spirit, but because I cannot help it — which the angels made of the women who came to the tomb seeking Christ : “ Why seek ye the living among the dead. He is not here, but is risen.” Yes, risen, infinitely above all such narrow restrictions, into the realm of the purely spiritual where we must go to seek and find him, the regenerator of life, the sum of all things to our souls.

And Jesus went out and departed from the temple, departed from it forever, pronouncing its woe ; “ there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Three days after he went up to Calvary and laid in his death the corner stone of a more beautiful temple ; “ in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the spirit.”

So we to-night go out and depart forever from this sanctuary, so long hallowed by the praises

and prayers of God's people, from these walls that have echoed year after year with the gospel of mercy, from this pulpit where eloquent lips, many of them silent now, have proclaimed the name of Jesus, from this altar where hundreds have professed their faith in Christ, from these pews where we have long worshiped, and where the fathers of many of this congregation worshiped, till God took them, from this place where this church had its first beginning, and has reached its present strength; leaving such a spot we cannot repress some of the many reminiscences which the occasion suggests. There may be lessons to be derived from them, which we may well take with us, as tending to fulfill the hope in which we leave; that as God has been with us here, so he shall be with us whither we go, and that the departing out by the old and the looking forward to the new, may be but a type of a change to pass upon the inner life of the church; whereby all that has hindered the coming of the kingdom of God shall be put off; and a life of purer devotion, of wider service and more Christ like spirit be put on; for then there will be nothing to regret but the disap-

pearance of an old land mark, in this growing and prosperous city.

This edifice was erected by the First Presbyterian church of Albany, and it removed here from its old house of worship, a wooden structure near the northeast corner of Hudson and Grand streets, Nov. 20, 1796, a little more than seventy-two years ago. This is a long period in the life of our city. These years have witnessed that remarkable progress which Albany in common with the whole country has experienced. In 1792, four years before this church was erected, Albany contained only 1,100 houses, and a population of less than 10,000. It also marks the increase in the value of property, when we say that the lot upon which this house stands, valued now at \$38,000.00, was purchased by the trustees of the First Presbyterian church, in 1792, for \$275.00. We are also reminded that we live in a changed world when we read, that in early times it was customary to stretch a chain¹ across Pearl and Beaver streets, to prevent the passage of vehicles,

¹ This chain was removed about the year 1830.

during the hours of divine service; an arrangement which would have greatly promoted the comfort of this congregation of late years, though I have my doubts, whether the public generally would have regarded it with equal favor.

In everything belonging to the life of a great people there has been a growth, that has surpassed the wildest dreams of those who laid the foundation, of this edifice.

It would neither be possible nor appropriate to notice these changes, which have taken place in civil and commercial affairs; but we may recall with pleasure the development of Christian activity which has during this period characterized the church. In 1796 there were no Sabbath schools, no Foreign missionary societies, no Bible and no Tract societies. All these multifarious agencies had not then been thought of, which are exerting so powerful an influence upon the world to-day. With all our deficiencies, as compared with the men of the olden times, in these respects, so vital to a true conception and realization of the religion of Jesus, we have advanced very far from the position then occupied by the church. Every

age must shape its own activities to meet the changed circumstances of the world, and this departing out of places, and customs, and ideas, appropriate and beautiful and true, in the days of the fathers, but shows that we like them, are living men willing to grapple manfully with the problems of our own age; and so to clear the way for the better day to come.

This pulpit has been occupied by men of earnest piety and fervid eloquence. The first pastor who preached in this church was Rev. Eliphalet Nott, D.D., who was settled in 1798, and remained until 1804 when he accepted the presidency of Union College. He was succeeded by Rev. John B. Romeyn who preached until 1808. Rev. William Neill was pastor from 1809 to 1816. Rev. Arthur Jos. Stansbury from 1817 to 1821. Rev. Henry R. Weed from 1822 to 1829.

From 1830 to 1850, at which time this house was sold by the First Presbyterian church, Rev. John N. Campbell, D.D., exercised here the office of the Christian ministry in a manner that greatly endeared him to his own people, and gave him wide influence among the Christian people of this city.

In 1850 this house was purchased by an association of gentlemen, connected with different congregations in the city, with a view to the establishment of a new religious society of the faith and order of the Pilgrims. It resulted in the formation of the First Congregational church and society of Albany with a membership of eighty persons. By them this house was reopened for divine service in April, 1850. In December, Rev. Ray Palmer, D.D., accepted the call of the church and society, to become their pastor and religious teacher, and labored here successfully and acceptably until April 18th, 1866, a period of nearly sixteen years, when having accepted the secretaryship of the Congregational Union he was dismissed to his new field of labor. Of those who have preached statedly in this pulpit, but two are now living, Rev. Henry R. Weed and Rev. Ray Palmer, D.D.

And the same may be said of the majority who have worshiped here. This place, which once knew them, knows them no more forever. For many years this was called the "Court Church," because of the many distinguished gentlemen

connected with the government who attended its services. There was a pew set apart for the governor of the state, and one for the use of the city corporation. Such men as Hamilton and Burr have often occupied these pews and sat entranced under the eloquence which characterized Dr. Nott in his youthful days. Learned councillors, grave statesmen, successful merchants, beauty and wit, hearts joyous and sad, age on its staff, youth with vigorous step and high hope have thronged in these aisles, and looked up to catch the words of life from these pews. Where are they now? Alas! what a picture of the vanity of earthly glory. How shadowy do they appear to us, to-night, dancing along the same gay ways of life, to the same darkness of the grave. What a commentary upon the words so often reiterated from this place, to dull ears and lifeless hearts, is the silence and dust that has gathered over their very names. How faint sound the echoes of that eloquence — crowning gift of genius to man — with which these walls have again and again rung. Even those burning, scathing words of the funeral oration for Hamilton, which stirred so

profoundly not only the congregation which heard them, warm from the lips of the orator, but the heart of the whole country, have lost much of their fire by the lapse of time. It was on that occasion that Dr. Nott gave voice to the sentiments of abhorrence against the custom of dueling which Burr's murder of Hamilton evoked; and achieved for himself the enviable reputation of an orator fearless in defense of the truth.¹

And then there are the personal reminiscences and saintly memories, unknown to him who addresses you, which come over many hearts here of

"Forms they loved,
And lips they pressed
Long ago."

You cannot repress a feeling of sadness as you say farewell. You may linger to drop a tear as you look for the last time upon all here that reminds you of father and mother, of kindred and friends. These changes are sad; but life

¹ This discourse was preached by request of the "merchants and other citizens of Albany, before a concourse of people the most respectable and numerous ever before assembled in this city, the death of Gen. Washington excepted," in the North Reformed church, July 29, 1804.

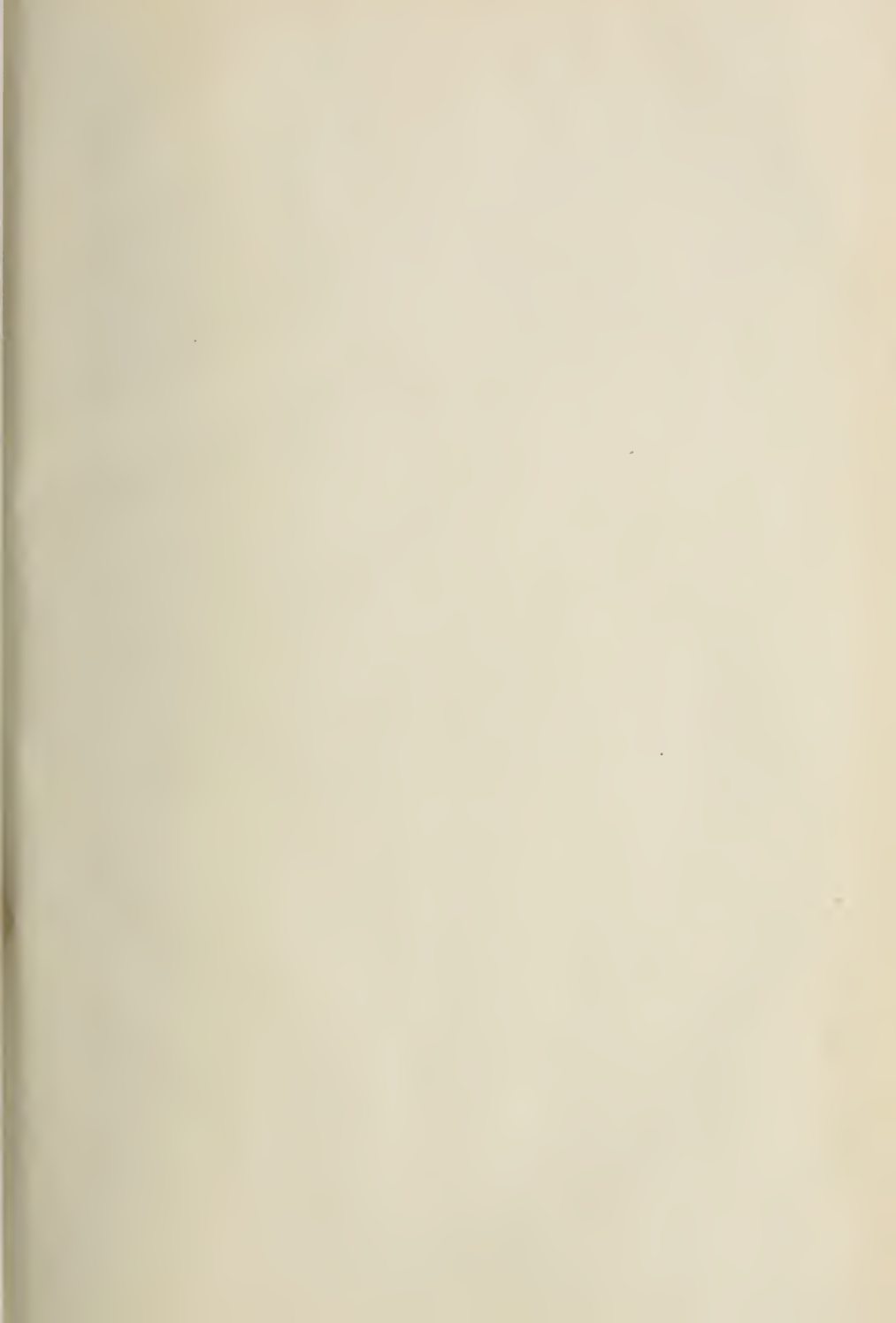
has ever been, and ever will be, full of such reminders, that this is not our home, that here we have no continuing city. It shall be well if gathering this lesson from the scenes of this parting hour you learn to live as "pilgrims and strangers on the earth," as all your fathers were. That lesson may be epitomized in the words of the holy Scriptures; "The fathers where are they, and the prophets do they live forever!"

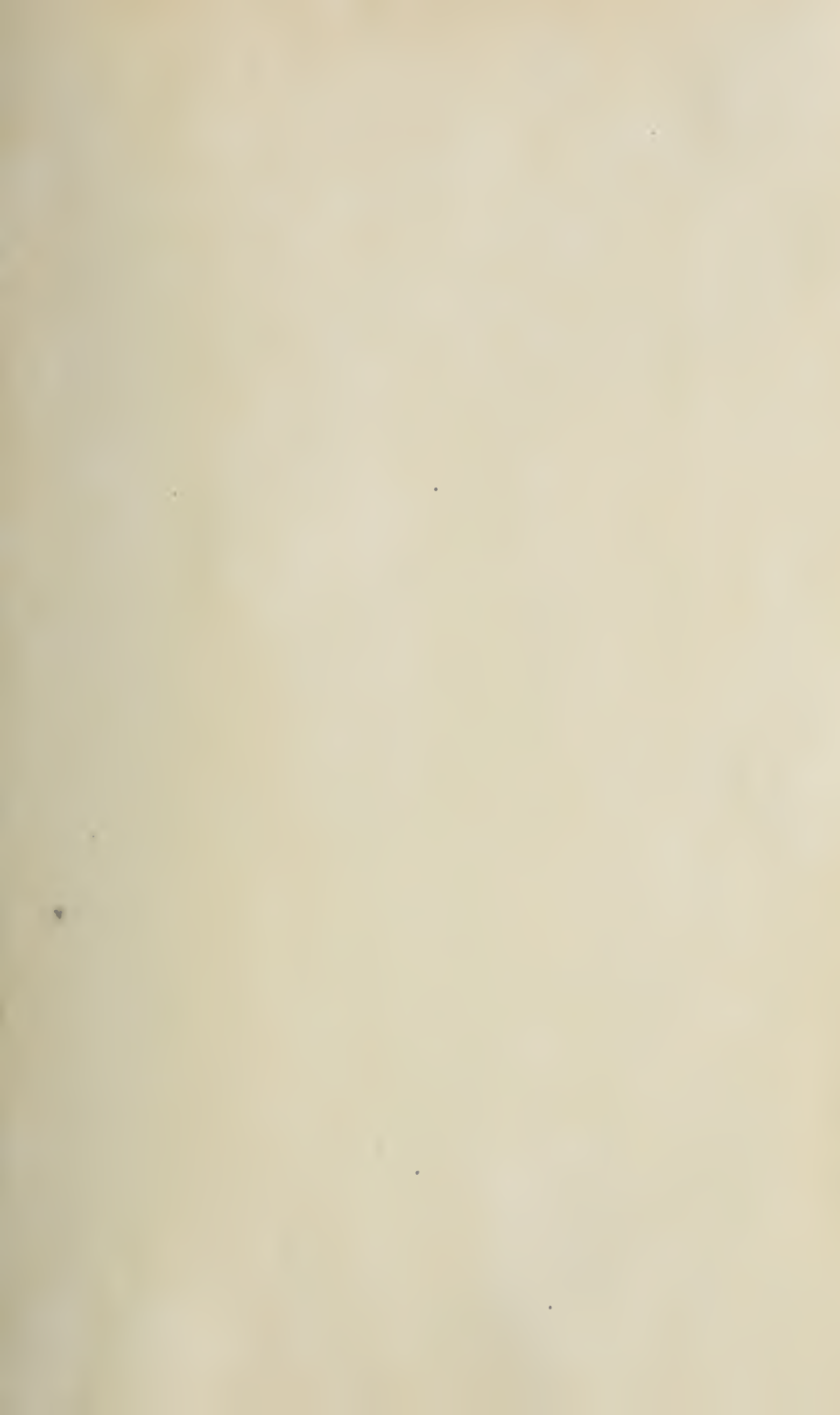
And now my friends you will hear the gospel here no more forever. It has been your privilege for years. With faithfulness, the minister has set before you your duty; with tender, earnest entreaty he has besought you to be reconciled to God; with solemnity and dignity, gathered from the word of God, he has reasoned with you of "righteousness, temperance and judgment to come." In all this you see the mercy of God, who has spared you that you might repent; the love of Christ who has waited long to save your soul. Many times has the truth and the spirit well nigh overpowered your indifference and almost persuaded you to be a Christian. And yet—I do not say that it is so, God only knows—and yet you are

not a Christian. Will you turn your back upon all these years of mercy, upon this love of Christ, upon all the gospel invitations which you have heard in this sanctuary, upon all the tender spiritual influences which have here rested upon your heart; can you, will you go from this place to-night without giving your heart to Christ? This going out from the old tabernacle, is but a shadow of another departure which must one day be made from the tabernacle of your body. Then we all need the "building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." Do you know that you have such a house? Do you know that you shall one day be clothed upon with this house? If you do not, your position is one of peril; that ought not to be continued for a single night. As we say farewell to this sanctuary, let us say farewell to our past neglect and coldness towards the blessed Saviour; and turning our faces heavenward, go forth to a new life of faith upon the son of God.

O! sacred place consecrated for so many years, by psalm and prayer, by spirit and truth, by

hours of soul communion with God, we depart from thee, and bear hence all that has constituted thy glory. Wast thou as fair as Dian's, or the far famed temples of Greece, yet might we leave thee without regret; for no age nor place can contain the Lord we worship. As his presence with us has hallowed thy walls, so shall it hallow for us other places. And while trade may reign here, and the petty interest of time absorb the minds of those who stand on this long consecrated spot; the kingdom of God, superior to all vicissitudes of man's changing life, to all accessories of man's devising, shall rise with benign light and power, higher and still higher, to bless all ages and nations with salvation.









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